DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 633 FL 015 585

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TITLE Let Your Students Do the Talking: Pattern Practices in a Partner System.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 12p.; In: Second Language Acquisition: Preparing for Tomorrow. Selected Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 3-5, 1986). For report of conference, see FL 015 577.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Organization; *Classroom Techniques; *Learning Activities; *Pattern Drills (Language); Second Language Instruction; *Speech Communication; Time on Task; *Visual Aids
IDENTIFIERS *Small Group Communication

ABSTRACT

The Classroom Pairing System (CPS) for second language instruction is a simple pattern practice technique that allows students to practice orally with a partner. An advantage of the technique is that it allows maximum time on task for each student in a large class. Students hold picture cards in their hands, and the partners ask and answer questions or make statements to each other according to the cards. After using the card, the students pass it on to another student pair until all pairs have used all cards. Because the cards are related to the content of the lesson, with this technique the students can practice all the material of the lesson in turn. The process is fast-paced, with many students talking at once, and can be used at any level or with any language, with commercial or teacher- or student-illustrated cards. CPS is not designed to elicit creative student responses, but only to practice patterns learned in class using illustrations to motivate visually-oriented students. Included are a number of examples of pattern practices that can be used in both French and Spanish, in beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes. (MSE)

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8 Let Your Students Do the Talking: Pattern Practices in a Partner System

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One of the greatest problems facing teachers today and in the near future is larger classes. From the days of audiolingualism foreign language teachers have known that class size should be below 20 so that all students can benefit from being able to speak the language each day. The pendulum has already begun to swing back from the days of too many teachers. In years to come fewer university graduates will have chosen the teaching profession. Foreign language teachers will be fewer and, therefore, may be asked to teach 35 students or more in one class period.

Large classes tend to make teachers very aware of time on task. Snyder (5) has pointed out that housekeeping duties, student-caused off-task time, outside interruptions, giving directions, changing activities, and other taking-care-of-business activities can steal from two to ten minutes per class each day. Teachers must recognize that it is crucial to plan lessons that increase each student's opportunities for speaking the foreign language. After studying many foreign language classes, however, Mueller (3) commented that the structure of the typical lesson consisted of a dull point-by-point rundown of the textbook's exercises, often punctuated by fuzzy grammar explanations and reading and translating uninteresting passages.

Time in the classroom must be used wisely, especially when enrollment is high. As larger classes become more common, the prevalent practice of teacher question/student response becomes less practical in the

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foreign language classroom. Honeycutt and Vernon (2) have pointed out that teachers need to develop new strategies to allow students to ask questions. There is no reason that the teacher must ask questions and the students respond, nor that only one person can be speaking at any one time. There are many typical situations in which more than one conversation may be taking place at the same moment.

The following section describes a system that allows each student in the class equal opportunity to speak the language, while at the same time minimizes the apprehension many feel when asked to recite or answer in class. The system works equally well in classes of 20 or 40. It also demands that students ask and answer an equal number of questions and that they remain on task throughout the entire exercise.

Classroom Pairing System

In the Classroom Pairing System (CPS) partners ask and answer questions or simply make statements to each other according to the visuals they are holding. CPS is a hands-on approach to learning foreign language using illustrated cards whereby all students in a class can practice orally all the material presented by the teacher in any particular lesson. The system is not designed, however, to elicit creative responses by students. CPS is a simple pattern practice system that allows students to practice orally with a partner. After answering according to the picture card(s) in hand, the cards are passed on to the next pair until every student has had all the cards. Many students are talking at the same time and the lesson is fast-paced. The approach can be used at any level or in any language. D'Va Illustrated Cards[1] are used as the visuals in the examples given below, but teacher- or student-made visuals can be just as effective as long as they are all in the same category and there are enough for the class.

Why Visuals?

Of course, pairs of students could practice exercises from their text, and even this is preferable to having the teacher direct one-question/one-answer exercises from the book. Visuals, however, offer a more interesting alternative to necessary but often rather dry grammatical pattern practices. Certainly not all grammatical concepts can be visualized—for example, "to be," "to be going to," or "must"—but visuals do provide another

dimension, a new alternative to understanding. Many recent textbooks have wonderful illustrations of verbs, activities, and even grammatical concepts that previously had been stated only in words. In most cases these visuals are pleasing to the eye and many times quite amusing.

In a study by Dwyer and Harper, the effectiveness of black and white line drawings to teach grammatical concepts in German was evaluated: "Forty minutes was spent teaching the nonvisual group the concept as opposed to nineteen with the visual group. It took more time—in fact, twice as much—to explain the grammar point in the conventional way than it did in the approach utilizing visualization; and after the instructional presentation, both groups tested approximately the same." (1, p. 232) The use of visuals to teach grammatical concepts increases time on task.

For years foreign language teachers have used visuals; in this video age it becomes even more important to incorporate them. Foreign language catalogs are sources of published materials such as vocabulary cards, but often these materials do not relate to the vocabulary in the textbook. Teachers work long and hard to make their own sets of visuals, cutting and pasting pictures from magazines, cornering the art teacher to find the best art students, or finally, in desperation, attempting to draw something themselves.

Sets of good visuals, however, are now available from a variety of sources, and with access to lamination, teachers can allow students to use the visuals as well. There is no reason why visuals need be used only in front of the classroom. Given 20 pictures illustrating regular first conjugation verbs, for example, a class of 40 students could practice all 20 verbs in a short time by working in pairs.

Why Partners?

Using partners for practice is logical. In most conversations one person asks a question and one person answers. Pairs are also less threatening than groups and certainly less intimidating than an entire class. Students are more willing to talk to one other person without being embarrassed about making a mistake than they are to make a statement to an entire class. Although small group work is common in many foreign language classes, there is a tendency to get off task, especially if one or more students are uncooperative. Even the slowest or most apathetic student participates

when the class practices in pairs. Active participation also insures that they will not be doing other work in class, grooming themselves, falling asleep, or daydreaming. Instead, the lesson is very fast paced and the pattern changes three, four, or even five times a minute. Finally, when using CPS all students must be on task because each succeeding pair of students depends on the previous pair to give new information to them and they, in turn, have to pass along their material.

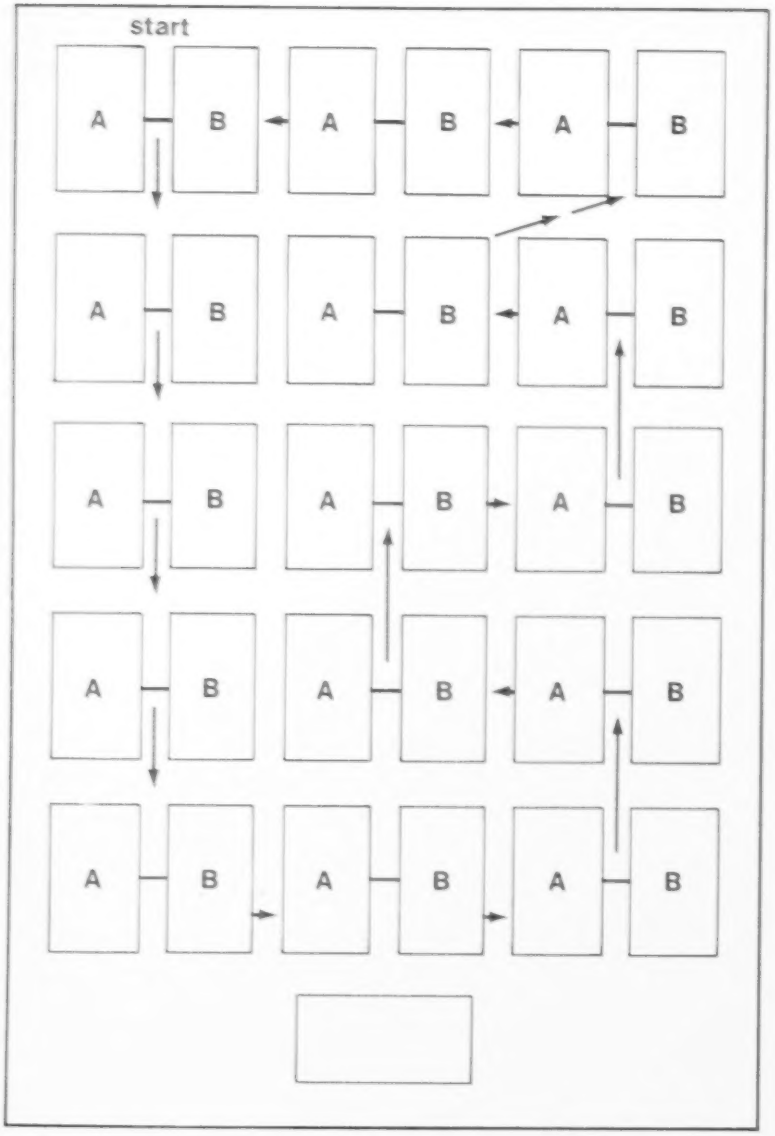
CPS Procedure

A traditional seating arrangement seems to work best in large classes. Any arrangement that allows for an even number of rows to accommodate partners is satisfactory. Each student has a partner sitting next to him or her; each pair receives a picture card. In small classes each student will receive a card. After practicing the drill (10 to 30 seconds) each pair will pass their card to the next pair and receive a new card from a different pair (see Figure 1). In this way all students practice a particular pattern with 15 to 40 substitutions, depending on class size and the number of visuals used in the exercise.

The teacher needs to do several things before beginning a pattern practice with the class using hands-on visuals:

1. Assign partners. Partners may remain the same for a month, six weeks, or an entire quarter if the teacher permits.
2. Practice the card-passing routine to avoid confusion that might stop the flow of language practice.
3. Be sure words in the foreign language are written on the back of each card. If the English meaning might be ambiguous, write both languages.
4. Demonstrate thoroughly the pattern to be practiced before expecting students to practice in pairs.
5. Determine in advance a cue word for the passing of cards.
6. Be sure that the last pair of students is sitting next to the first pair so that no students need to leave their seats in order to pass the cards.
7. If the class has an uneven number of students, the teacher becomes a partner.

Figure 1. CPS Seating Arrangement



As stated above, it is important that the teacher demonstrate the pattern to be practiced. Usually the "asker" holds the visual and the "answerer" responds according to that picture card. There are times, however, when the object of the exercise may be to practice vocabulary not yet mastered; then the person with the card might read from the back of the card while the partner listens.

The teacher needs to be careful not to allow too much time for a pattern. It is better for a partnership to give up their cards early than for another to sit with nothing to do.

The following are examples of pattern practices that can be used in both French and Spanish, in beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes. A variety of visuals is used in the examples and there is truly a limitless number of patterns that can be created by the teacher for students to practice.

The first examples demonstrate the system using one card per pair and then one card per person, using the same category. The student answering the question looks at his or her partner's card to receive the clue for the answer.

Example 1. (See Figure 2.) Beginning Level Spanish—Places (one picture card per *pair*)

(with "beach" card)	A: ¿Adónde vas?	(approximately
	B: Voy a la playa.	10 seconds)
Teacher cue word	¡Olé!	(pairs pass/ receive card)
(with "café" card)	B: ¿Adónde vas?	(approx.
	A: Voy al café.	10 seconds)
Teacher cue word	¡Olé!	(pairs pass/ receive card)

Example 1a. Beginning Level Spanish—Places (one picture card per *student*)

(with "beach" card)	A: ¿Adónde vas?	(approx.
(with "café" card)	B: Voy a la playa.	20 seconds)
	¿Adónde vas tú?	
	A: Yo voy al café.	

Teacher cue word	¡Olé!	(pairs pass/ receive cards)
(with "museum" card)	B: ¿Adónde vas?	(approx.
(with "airport" card)	A: Voy al museo. ¿Adónde vas tú?	20 seconds)
	B: Yo voy al aeropuerto.	

Example 2. (See Figure 3.) Intermediate Level French—Reflexive Verbs (one picture card per *pair*)

(with "wake up" card)	A: A quelle heure est-ce que tu te réveilles?
	B: Je me réveille à . . . heures.
Teacher cue word	Salut!
(with "shave" card)	B: A quelle heure est-ce que tu te rases?
	A: Je me rase à . . . heures.

Example 2a. Intermediate Level French (one picture card per *student*)

(with "wake up" card)	A: A quelle heure est-ce que tu te réveilles?
(with "shave" card)	B: Je me réveille à . . . heures. A quelle heure est-ce que tu te rases?
	A: Je me rase à . . . heures.
Teacher cue word:	Salut!
(with "comb" card)	A: A quelle heure est-ce que tu te peignes?
(with "get dressed" card)	B: Je me peigne à . . . heures. A quelle heure est-ce que tu t'habilles?
	A: Je m'habille à . . . heures.

In the following examples only one picture card is used per pair but one can readily see in examples 1a and 2a how the procedure would be altered if each student were holding a card.

Example 3. (See Figure 4.) Intermediate Spanish—Imperfect Tense with Adjectives

(with "tall" card)	A: ¿Cómo eran tus amigos?

Figure 2.

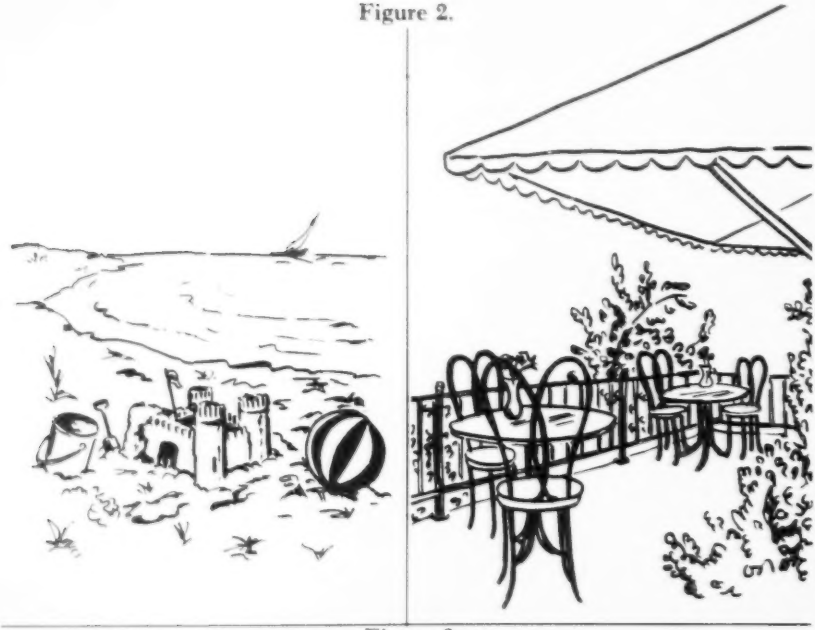


Figure 3.

	B: (Mis amigos) eran altos.
Teacher cue word.	¡Olé!
(with "good" card)	B: ¿Cómo eran tus amigos?
	A: (Mis amigos) eran buenos.

Example 4. (See Figure 5.) Advanced Spanish—Regular Second and Third Conjugation Verbs with Imperfect Subjunctive

(with "eat" card)	A: ¿Qué quería tu padre que hicieras?
	B: Mi padre quería que yo comiera el pollo.
Teacher cue word	¡Olé!
(with "letter" card)	B: ¿Qué quería tu padre que hicieras tú?
	A: Mi padre quería que yo escribiera una carta.

Example 5. Advanced French—Direct/Indirect Objects with Food

(with a card	A: Ils veulent cette glace.
depicting ice cream)	B: Donne-la-leur.
	A: Très bien, je la leur donnerai.
Teacher cue word	Salut!
(with a card	B: Ils veulent ces pâtisseries.
depicting pastries)	A: Donne-les-leur.
	B: Très bien, je les leur donnerai.

The above examples are only a few of the hundreds of creative patterns that can be practiced in any foreign language classroom. One is only limited by the kind and number of visuals.

Rivers (4) has stated that initial listening should be accompanied by visual cues to the meaning of pictures, objects, and actions. Given the short amount of time students are actually in the classroom and interacting with the language, using CPS will continue to reinforce vocabulary and grammatical concepts through the repeated use of hands-on visuals. Finally, as Rivers also states, visual cues help students think for themselves and keep them alert.

Creativity and real communication in the language are the goals of foreign language teachers today. Just as one cannot attempt division in

Figure 4.

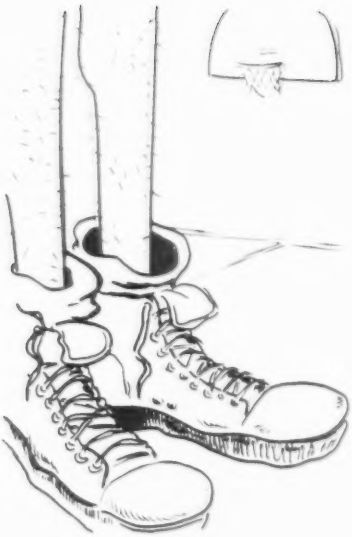


Figure 5.

mathematics without having mastered multiplication, nor can students communicate in a foreign language if they have not mastered basic grammatical structures and concepts and memorized useful vocabulary.

The Classroom Pairing System is a student-centered system; it can be rewarding to the teacher and to the student, as well as fun and educational. CPS is a viable alternative to the more traditional use of classroom visuals and takes into account a visually oriented generation of students in today's classrooms.

Notes

1. Visuals created by DeMarest Hill of D'Va Illustrated Cards, 1496 Parkhill Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44121.

References

1. Dwyer, F. M., and Dianne Harper. "The Effect of Visualization in Teaching Grammatical Concepts in Foreign Language Instruction." *International Journal of Instructional Media* 1 (1983–84): 223–233.
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5. Snyder, Barbara. "Time on Task: Activities That Meet the Challenge." North Eastern Ohio Teachers Association Foreign Language Conference, Lakewood, Ohio, October 11, 1985.